

News Items and Public Crime Summary for Week Ending January 9, 2010

Kingdom: MFA Verhagen: Incriminations by Venezuela Unfounded

"The new incriminations by Venezuela that Curacao and Aruba are used by the U.S. to prepare an attack are incorrect, unfounded and just made up," said Kingdom Foreign Minister Verhagen 1/1 in reaction to renewed statements by Venezuelan President Hugo Chavez. The minister said the Ambassador of Venezuela would be summoned to the MFA to give an explanation.

A few weeks ago during the climate conference in Copenhagen, President Chavez accused the Netherlands of facilitating U.S. espionage flights from Antillean airports. In a subsequent talk with the Venezuelan Ambassador the Dutch government reiterated that U.S. military efforts are solely aimed at combating drug trafficking. On that occasion it was agreed to have a follow-up meeting after the Ambassador had found out in Caracas what the accusation was based on.

Last week Chavez dismissed the Dutch assurances and repeated his incrimination that the U.S. is using the Netherlands Antilles to prepare an attack on Venezuela. The President called on the Dutch government to end the Forward Operating Location operations.

Minister Verhagen rejects Chavez' incriminations and said that "The Netherlands will not allow its territory to be used for aggression and strives for good relations with Venezuela." "The Dutch government demands an expedited clarification of Chavez' statements by the Venezuelan Ambassador," Verhagen said. "That follow-up meeting with the Venezuelan Ambassador is now to take place soon." At that meeting it will again be made clear that the civil airports of the Netherlands Antilles have been made available to the U.S. to combat drug trafficking from the air with unarmed aircraft.

(Various media)

Kingdom – USFOLs Not Used For Prisoner Transportation

Dutch Kingdom Foreign Minister Verhagen stated, in a response to questions by Dutch MPs, that based on data provided by the U.S. government and from own observations, it appears that the USFOLs were not used to transport detainees and/or prisoners, excluding own personnel members.

The Minister also explained to Dutch Parliament that the USFOL operations are regulated in the FOL-agreement. Dutch MPs raised their concern about reports in the media that the Netherlands Antilles government could authorize visits by U.S. aircraft and ships without consulting with The Hague'.

Verhagen explained that Article II (Purposes of Agreement; Authorization) states: The Netherlands Antilles and Aruba agree to allow the United States Government (USG) access to and use of the Hato International Airport in the Netherlands Antilles and the Reina Beatrix International Airport in Aruba, as well as authorized ports and related facilities, solely in connection with aerial counternarcotics detection and monitoring, and, as appropriate, interdiction missions in the neighboring region. The access and use authorized under this Agreement shall be limited to U.S. personnel, aircraft riders, contractors, and contractor employees as well as vessels and vehicles used for direct

operational and logistic support, and unarmed aircraft; operated by or exclusively for the USG.

Verhagen also said that based on Article IV (Aircraft and Aircraft Overflight Clearance Procedures) aircraft operated in connection with this Agreement by or for the USG are authorized to overfly, land at, and depart from the Hato International Airport in the Netherlands Antilles and the Reina Beatrix International Airport in Aruba without diplomatic clearance. Such activities shall be in accordance with agreed aviation procedures. For all other non-FOL related flights and for VIP-visits, the USG must follow the regular authorization procedure via The Hague. (Various media)

Curacao - Venezuela Says: USFOL Flights Violating Airspace

Venezuela's government said last Thursday that U.S. military counter-drug flights from Curacao are violating its airspace in preparation for an attack. A U.S. official denied the allegation.

A Venezuelan Foreign Ministry statement listed no examples of such violations, but it accused the United States of using "the colonial territories of Aruba and Curacao in preparation for a military aggression against Venezuela."

Venezuela's president, Hugo Chavez, has repeatedly complained about Dutch permission for the U.S. to use Curacao and Aruba for flights meant to monitor drug planes from South America.

Chavez has repeatedly accused the U.S. of plotting to invade Venezuela or overthrow him since 2002, when a failed coup briefly removed him from power. U.S. officials have denied any such plans and say they did not back the coup.

The Venezuelan Foreign Ministry expressed doubt that the flights are aimed at drug traffickers and urged the Netherlands "to abstain from attacking Venezuela or lending its collaboration to that end."

A spokesman for U.S. Defense Department's Southern Command in Miami, Stephen Lucas, denied that U.S. military flights out of Aruba and Curacao are violating Venezuelan airspace. He said a U.S. Navy plane accidentally strayed into Venezuelan airspace on a counter-drug mission seven months ago, but he said "that is an anomaly, not standard operating procedure."

He said the counter-drug flights from the Caribbean islands do not fly over Venezuela because Chavez has denied them access for years, even in cases of hot pursuit.

"It's regrettable the government of Venezuela has chosen to downgrade its cooperation in counter-drug activities but that is the case," Lucas said. "The threat posed by transnational illicit trafficking is a threat to all the nations of the region."

He also denied the flights had any purpose other than fighting narcotics trafficking.

"The point of the existence of our operations on the islands of Curacao and Aruba is counter-drug, and it has absolutely nothing to do with political or other events in Venezuela," he said.

Chavez also has bitterly criticized neighboring Colombia's decision to grant U.S. forces expanded access to its bases, and has said Venezuelan troops at a base near the Colombian border recently spotted what he believes was a U.S. drone in Venezuelan airspace. (Various media)

Curacao – 8th Pre-Election Poll: Sovereign Party Losing Ground

The lead of the opposition parties is dropping slightly based on the 8th pre-election poll by Opinion Korsou. The division of parliamentary seats would not change compared to

the poll last week. Lista pa Kambio (6); PAR (4); Sovereign Party (2); PNP (2). The Lista Kambio (41%, +1), a combination of opposition parties MAN, NPA, and Forsa Korsou, and the Sovereign Party (13%, -3), the only party striving for independence, have lost together 2% compared to the previous poll. Coalition party FOL would not get a seat in parliament. The changes for the other parties are insignificant.

The polling organizers stated that their poll is independent and scientifically based. The poll is also available on www.opinionkorsou.com. (Antilliaans Dagblad, Extra)

Antilles – New Minister Plenipotentiary in Washington, DC

Ann Groot-Philipps is reportedly the new Minister Plenipotentiary for the Netherlands Antilles in Washington, DC. Groot-Philipps is a career Foreign Service Officer for the Netherlands Antilles government. She replaces Norberto Ribeiro who has returned to Curacao. (Antilliaans Dagblad)

Aruba – Refunjol: Island Should Prepare for a Future Without a Refinery

In his New Year's speech, Aruba's Governor Fredis Refunjol focused on the environment, youth and the economy. Refunjol said that Aruba should "seriously" start considering a future without an oil refinery.

Aruban Finance, Utilities, Communication, and Energy Minister Mike de Meza said that US-owned Valero representatives have not made any announcement regarding a permanent refinery closure, contrary to rumors in the community. The Aruba government is trying to help sell the US-owned Valero refinery which was closed indefinitely last August.

The Aruban government and PetroChina are reportedly still talking about the purchase of the refinery. (Extra)

Curacao – PAR Campaign Leader Concerned About Opposition Supporting Chavez

Antillean Education and Social Development Minister Omayra Leeflang accused the Curaçao opposition parties of supporting Venezuelan President Hugo Chávez. Leeflang questioned the position by opposition parties "Lista di Kambio" (LdK) and Sovereign Party (PS) towards Venezuela, in a press release.

Leeflang criticized the position of MAN and LdK leader Charles Cooper who is employed by the Isla refinery and advocates the sale of Isla refinery to Venezuelan state-owned oil company PdVSA.

"According to Cooper, we should sell the entire refinery to PdVSA which implies that we relinquish our refinery authority to the Venezuelan government. Furthermore the Venezuelan influence on Curacao would substantially grow," Leeflang stated.

Leeflang also criticized the anti-U.S. Forward Operating Location (USFOL) rhetoric by PS leader Helmin Wiels. In a letter to Dutch Parliament, Wiels argued against renewal of the USFOL agreement which expires in 2011. In a drafted alternative constitution for Curaçao, the PS states: "Curacao does not allow any military presence on its territory other than the Kingdom of the Netherlands." Leeflang is of the opinion that Wiels openly supports Chavez who repeatedly made similar anti-USFOL remarks.

Chavez frequently accuses the Kingdom of the Netherlands of allowing the U.S. to use Netherlands Antilles and Aruba to prepare a possible military attack against his country.

The Venezuelan leader said the U.S. military, to prepare for a possible offensive, has sent intelligence agents, war ships and spy planes to Aruba, Curacao and Bonaire. Dutch Kingdom Foreign Minister Verhagen emphatically denied these allegations and stated on various occasions that all three entities of the Kingdom of the Netherlands have no idea what Chavez is talking about. (Various media)

Curacao – Opposition Support Dismantling Process on Their Terms

LdK opposition leader Charles Cooper said that he wants Curacao to leave the Netherlands Antilles (NA) constellation as soon as possible, but based on his own terms. The opposition wants to restart negotiations with the Dutch government, because they believe that the financial and judicial oversight authority retained by the Kingdom is a form of recolonization. The Dutch government repeatedly said that the dissolution agreement signed by the Kingdom partners is non-negotiable. The Kingdom partners agreed that the Netherlands will absorb 70% of the total debt of the NA (approximately 2 billion USD) in return for some degree of financial supervision and judicial oversight. Any form of renegotiations could jeopardize the debt relief agreement. Central Bank President Emsley Tromp is of the opinion that a halt of the debt relief will cause a severe negative economic impact. Tromp envisions a tax hike of 90% in a worst case scenario and urges the politicians to continue on the taken dissolution path. (Various media)

Aruba – Valero Refinery Sale Process Ongoing

U.S.-owned Valero Energy Corp, Chinese-state oil giant PetroChina and Aruba's Prime Minister Mike Eman on Tuesday were negotiating the sale of the Valero refinery in Aruba, according to an Aruban government spokesman.

The refinery, which can process 235,000 barrels per day of oil, has been on the sales block for at least a year. Valero shuttered the plant in August due to poor refining economics.

Valero spokesman Bill Day confirmed discussions about the sale of the refinery but would not confirm the identity of the buyer nor how far along the process was.

PetroChina, one of several parties interested in buying the refinery, is seen as a good fit after it recently took over 5 million of crude oil storage capacity from Saudi Arabia in the region.

Aruba is keen to keep the refinery operational. "It provides 30 to 35% of our GDP and keeps many Arubans employed," said government spokesperson Besselink.

U.S. government data puts Aruba's 2005 GDP at \$2.258 billion, with the lion's share coming from tourism and virtually all of the remainder from the refinery. (Aruba post)

Curacao - Venezuelan VP: There Is Evidence of US Incursion From Curacao

Venezuelan Vice President Ramón Carrizález said that the Venezuelan government has evidence to confirm the claim made by Venezuelan President Hugo Chávez that the U.S. government has used Curacao to carry out military operations.

Carrizález made these remarks in a departure ceremony of a Venezuelan training ship at the port of La Guaira, the state-run news agency ABN reported.

"On May 17, 2009 (sic) a U.S. warplane took off from Curacao, violated Venezuelan airspace and a non-fly zone such as La Orchila airfield military airport; we have the

records of conversations between the airport control tower and the airplane where the pilot was asked if they had authorization to overfly the area and asking him for the reasons of the incursion. We also have records of the flight and we can make them available to show that Curacao is used indeed to violate our national sovereignty," Carrizalez said.

Netherlands Antilles chairman of Parliament Pedro Atacho said in a reaction to the recent anti-USFOL rhetoric that the main objective of the USFOL is counter-drug. "It is important to keep our territorial area narcotics free," Atacho stated. Also, he said that the opposition is using the presence of the USFOL geopolitically; is the presence of the Coast Guard which serves the same counter-drug purpose their next target?

Venezuela's Chavez also criticized the position of Aruban PM Mike Eman, who this week said that the Netherlands clearly clarified the purpose of its military anti-drug agreement with the U.S. Eman is of the opinion that the diplomatic tension generated by Venezuela's complaint is unfounded. (Various media)

Bonaire – MSNBC: Bonaire, A Diver's Paradise

On a slow ascent to the surface of the water from 60 feet (18 meters) down, the dive master spots something thrilling along the reef and extends her hand with all five fingers wiggling excitedly. It is a signal that can mean only one thing: Octopus!.....

The full article is available at <http://www.msnbc.msn.com/id/34354209/ns/travel-active/> (Various media)

St. Maarten – Cruise Tourism Down in 2009, But Expectations for 2010 High

St. Maarten recorded a 9.7% cruise passenger drop in 2009, compared to 2008, but the St. Maarten Tourism Authority forecasts a 20% arrivals increase in 2010-2011.

A total of 1,215,146 cruise passengers visited St. Maarten in 2009, 130,666 fewer than in 2008. There were 500 cruise port calls for 2009, 18 fewer calls than in the previous year. The decrease is primarily contributed to the global financial crisis. (Daily Herald)

Curacao – BING.COM: Top Destinations for 2010: Curacao

The Microsoft Internet Search Engine BING lists the Dutch island of Curacao as their top pick for the Caribbean this year, thanks to its gorgeous natural features (including wild flamingoes), a rich history and a unique culture. This is not the prototypical, frat-boy destination for spring breakers. (Curacao and its Dutch neighbors, Aruba and Bonaire, are closer to Venezuela than the rest of the Caribbean islands, in sentiment as well as geography.) The capital city of Willemstad is a worthy base for exploring the island and its quiet beaches. The new Renaissance Curacao Resort and Casino offers ocean-view balconies and an on-site spa. For more information visit:

<http://www.bing.com/travel/content/search?q=Top+Destinations+for+2010&form=QBTRAV> (Various media)

Curacao - Stranded Pilot Whale Arrives in California

A stranded pilot whale that was nursed back to health in Curacao is now at a Southern California marine park. The Southern Caribbean Cetacean Network says the whale has been flown to SeaWorld San Diego on a cargo plane.

The animal washed ashore on Curacao in July 2009. Biologists later determined it would not survive if released because it would not rejoin wild pods.

SeaWorld spokesman David Koontz said Tuesday the 1,000-pound creature is adapting to its new surroundings and isn't yet on public display. It will eventually live with the park's two other pilot whales. Volunteers named the pilot whale "Sully," after pilot Chesley Sullenberger, who guided his crippled jetliner into New York's Hudson River. (Various media)

Kingdom – New Kingdom Policy Document Focuses on Fight Against Crime in the Caribbean

The Kingdom will continue to focus on the fight against international crime, trade opportunities, and human rights in a regional Caribbean context, according to a new policy document „The foreign policy of the Kingdom in the Caribbean“.

The Kingdom encourages countries to implement and execute the recommendations of the American Convention on Human Rights (also known as the Pact of San José). The Kingdom wants to contribute to regional integration via various regional and international organizations.

The Kingdom and the individual autonomous entities support the developments in Caricom also carried by the EU, which will advance the realization of a communal market. Also, the Kingdom Embassies and Consulates need to fulfill an important role by stimulating trade and investments in the Caribbean parts of the Kingdom, in particular with the United States.

The document also addresses Trafficking in Persons (TIP) and Human Smuggling issues in the Caribbean part of the Kingdom and praises the progress made on various issues during the past years. The report highlighted the TIP Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) signed between the Kingdom partners, last year.

The penalization of TIP is included in the entire revision of the Netherlands Antilles Penal Code. “Based on the excellent relations between the Kingdom and the United States, efforts were made to emphasize on the unity and indivisibility of the Kingdom.”

Human rights are also a main focus of the Kingdom foreign policy. The policy document states that the Kingdom will continue to observe, promote, and protect human rights. Various projects to improve and strengthen the human rights policies will be financed through the Human Rights Fund, not just in the Caribbean parts of the Kingdom but also in neighboring Caribbean countries such as Haiti and Cuba. (Amigoe)

Kingdom – Strengthen Bilateral Relationship with Venezuela

The Kingdom of the Netherlands wants to intensify its bilateral relationship with Venezuela, „the largest neighboring country of the Kingdom“ at political and official levels, according to their latest December 2009, MFA policy document.

The Kingdom desires to be a stabilizing factor in the relationship between the United States and Venezuela. Especially in relation to concerns raised by the Venezuelan government regarding the U.S Forward Operating Location and U.S. military ship visits The Kingdom government is continuously monitoring that the territory of the Kingdom in the Caribbean is used transparently and it has informed the Venezuelan authorities on a regular basis, in advance, via the appropriate channels concerning visits by nuclear operated U.S. navy assets,” Dutch Ministers of Foreign Affairs Maxime Verhagen and Development Cooperation, Bert Koenders stated.

The common history, mutual family relations, economical relations, and tourism tie the Leeward Islands to Venezuela, according to the Dutch Ministers. "These ties are particularly strong on Curaçao where the Venezuelan state-owned oil company PdVSA leases the Isla-refinery. The pursue of a Bolivarian revolution by the Venezuelan government does not hinder maintaining and where possible extending the good relations with Venezuela as long as the democratic legitimacy of the government, respects the human rights and the observance of mutual sovereignty are guaranteed." Venezuela plays an active role in the Caribbean region, according to the document. ALBA (Alternativa Bolivariana para las Américas) and Petrocaribe could have positive effects on social/economical field for individual countries in the Caribbean region, but these initiatives could also complicate the integration process in the Caribbean region. Venezuela is the fourth economy in Latin America, the thirtieth in the world, and an interesting country for Dutch companies.

Another important area of cooperation is counter narcotics. "Drug trafficking in the region originates from Venezuela via, amongst others, the Netherlands Antilles and Aruba. Frequent contact between the Royal Dutch Navy and the Netherlands Antilles and Aruba Coastguard and the Venezuelan Navy and Coastguard is crucial. Joint exercises are held periodically. The operational cooperation between the police forces of the Kingdom and Venezuela is outstanding. (Amigoe)

Bonaire – Alleged Political Corruption Case Under Investigation

The Dutch Government has asked Netherlands Antilles Governor Frits Goedgedrag to investigate an alleged deal, reportedly involving a US \$300,000 bribe, between Bonaire's Commissioner Anthony Nicolaas and the ADB party of Jopie Abraham to overthrow the former UPB party led Island Government. The alleged deal has shocked politicians in The Hague and the Netherlands Antilles, but Nicolaas and Abraham have qualified the accusations as an election stunt. (Various media)

CURAÇAO

Crime January 1 – 7

On January 5 a young man was shot and killed in a drive-by shooting in Amerikanenkamp. The victim had been released from prison last October and had allegedly been involved in a shooting incident in 2006. On January 7 a courier for a lottery ticket-selling business was robbed by two men in Santa Maria (Amigoe, Extra, Antilliaans Dagblad).

Revised Criminal Code to be discussed in Parliament

President of Antillean Parliament Pedro Atacho (PAR) stated that Parliament will return from recess on January 25 and that preparations are being made to deal with the revised Criminal Code which is expected to provide law enforcement and the judiciary with additional modern tools to tackle crime. The draft for the revised Criminal Code was submitted by the Minister of Justice and it is expected to be discussed in Parliament during the month of February (St. Maarten Island time).

ARUBA

Crime January 1 – 7

On January 6 a home owner in Sero Blanco was robbed by two masked men who had broken into the home (Amigoe, Diario Aruba).

"The Weekly Press Summary is a compilation of stories running in the Netherlands Antilles and Aruban press that is intended to alert readers about items of interest to them. There is no interpretation or verification of the facts contained therein."